

Brethren Evangelist

"I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life."—Jesus

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To Be Seen of Men

This is a great temptation. It was a characteristic of the Pharisees and Christ disdained it. They prayed in public places, they gave ostentatious charity, they wore broad phylacteries, they did many outwardly pious things, but all to be seen of men. The Lord could not conceal his contempt of them. They did not perceive God at all. In their thought, where was he? Hidden in some distant corner of the universe, where he was too busy about large matters either to see or to care what was going on in this little world. We are always and everywhere struck with the care and thought God evidences in the matter of human character. Take for example this picture of the Pharisees, a picture not at all local or provincial, but typical of human nature in all ages and lands. It was not the *quality* of the action for which they cared, but its effect upon the popular estimate of them. They only wished to stand well with their fellows, and have a reputation for religiousness. Not to really have what they thus advertised to have was in God's eyes the meanest sort of lying. He looks at the heart, the life, the inner quality, and he wants a man to be real and true. He wants a man to be sound at the core. All of the discipline of his providence, all the teaching of his word, all the inner working of his Holy Spirit, has for object this construction of the kind of character which will befit a citizen of the Eternal Kingdom. We ought to strive after a just conception of this sublime destiny, this citizenship of a kingdom which will endure endlessly, and to form the very best possible estimate of the kind of character, the kind of manhood, essential to the perfection of such a society. For we must bear in mind that not the place but the people make heaven. The character of God, the character of holy angels, the character of just spirits of men made perfect, these constitute heaven; while the external glory, the blaze of jeweled walls and golden mansions, are merely accessories. If men and women, such as men are and such as women are, in this world, lived forever, the curse would be unendurable. It is a blessing that even the good and the gifted die, for they outlive their strength, and often their usefulness. The dwellers in the Eternal Kingdom will never die because they shall always be *fit* to live.

Perhaps we are wandering a little from our text and we will therefore come back to it abruptly. You eloquent brother in the pulpit, what a fine gift of speech thine is, and how thou doest gather in the admiring looks of the appreciative congregation when some resounding period rolls silvery and beautiful from thy lips. "To be seen of men," is it? Was it for this thou elaborated this climacteric passage in the quiet seclusion of the study? How much more excellent, what grace of inner beauty would have adorned it, had it been *real*, the outpouring of the soul, an offering to God, the manifest expression of God in us. This is the secret of eloquent and sublime speech. "To be seen of men" is the shammiest of shams. It is the *real thing* you *must* have, or fail dismally and eternally. Despise this vanity, and get God in you. Then will men see a bright and shining light indeed, and there will be a vitalizing power in it that will change their hearts and lives.

Thou ready writer with the pen; it is a mighty engine of power; it is a rare and beautiful gift. We all admire those ringing, those classical, those poetic, those strong, resonant sentences, those—ah, even before we get to the end of our compliments the smile of pleased vanity betrays "to be seen of men" spirit. What a pity, this fly in the fragrant ointment. Gouge him out. Let us value the better ointment of that inner excellence that pleases God. If we would speak with the voice of the rolling thunder and write with the shaft of the vivid lightnings, let God sit at the seat of power in our souls. Try it, ye orators and scribes of the kingdom.

After all, what doth it profit a man to please men? Pilate did a thing "to please the Jews," and he becomes the execration of all the ages. Beware, lest when we try to please men, we also like Pilate crucify Christ. But if we please them, what doth it profit us? How long will this ephemeral fame endure? Is there an eternal world prepared, an eternal life provided, an inexpressible felicity ordained, for him who dandles the tinsel of a few accomplishments, the tawdry ornaments of a swollen vanity, in the gaze of the gaping crowd? It is nothing, less than nothing, and there will be some wise man in the multitude of dullards who will search him out, or else God will search him out, and find that he is nothing, less than nothing.